

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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SUBJECT: POLITICAL SITUATION IN GUJARAT

1. BOMBAY PRESS JAN 28 CONTRIBUTES TO GROWING SPECULATION CONCERNING FUTURE OF JANATA FRONT GOVERNMENT IN GUJARAT BY REPORTING THAT KMLP IS LIKELY TO WITHDRAW ITS SUPPORT FROM THE FRONT GOVERNMENT SHORTLY. IN LATEST DEVELOPMENT, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE KMLP JAIDEEPSINHJI ATTACKED THE FRONT GOVERNMENT FOR NOT COMING TO GRIPS WITH THE PROBLEMS OF THE STATE AND FOR FAILING TO ESTABLISH ITS CONTROL OVER THE STATE ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY. THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE 12 KMLP LEGISLATORS FROM THE FRONT GOVERNMENT COULD EMBOLDEN THE SIX INDEPENDENT LEGISLATORS WHO SUPPORT THE FRONT TO WITHDRAW THEIR SUPPORT ALSO WHICH WOULD BRING THE FRONT DOWN. THUS THE KMLP CAN INITIATE THE FALL OF THE FRONT GOVERNMENT. WITH THE OPENING OF THE BUDGET SESSION NOW SCHEDULED FOR FEB 9, THE MANEUVERINGS OF THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS ARE VERY SIGNIFICANT FOR THE FUTURE OF THE FRONT.

2. WE HAVE HEARD RECENTLY FROM GOOD SOURCES THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE FRONT PARTNERS HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY STRAINED,
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WITH THE CONGRESS (O) FACTION SUSPICIOUS THAT THE JANA SANGH

HAS BEEN EXPLOITING THE FRONT TO WIDEN ITS OWN ORGANIZATIONAL BASE. CONGRESS (O) LEADERS REPORTEDLY FEEL THAT THE MERGER OF THE TWO CONGRESSES IS PREFERABLE TO THE GROWTH OF JANA SANGH IN THE STATE, BUT CONGRESS (O) LEADERS WOULD NOT TAKE ANY STEP TOWARDS MERGER WHILE MORARJI DESAI IS STILL IN JAIL. A TACTICAL SKIRMISH BETWEEN CHIEF MINISTER BABUBHAI PATEL AND GPCC(O) PRESIDENT DINESH SHAH BECAME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE WHEN PATEL REPORTEDLY PROPOSED MAKING GPCC(O) HEADQUARTERS IN AHMEDABAD THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE FRONT. WE HEAR THAT SHAH OBJECTED TO THIS ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT COULD LEAD TO A LOSS OF IDENTITY FOR THE GPCC(O).

3. APART FROM BABUBHAI PATEL, THE FRONT HAS FAILED TO PROVIDE NOTABLE LEADERS FOR THE STATE. EVEN PATEL SEEMS TO HAVE SUCCUMBED TO THE DESIRE TO STAY IN POWER, AND THE FRONT GOVERNMENT IS SAID TO DEVOTE MORE TIME TO ITS SURVIVAL AND CONTINUANCE IN POWER THAN TO GOVERNING THE STATE. THE BLOOM OF THE FRONT GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO HAVE FADED AND

THE INITIAL DYNAMISM OF THE FRONT IS NO LONGER APPARENT.

4. WE HAD HEARD EARLIER THAT THE KMLP HAD BEGUN TO RECONSIDER ITS DECISION TO SUPPORT THE FRONT UNCONDITIONALLY. THE LEADER OF THE KMLP LEGISLATIVE WING, VALLABHBHAI PATEL, REPORTEDLY CALLED ON THE CHIEF MINISTER ON JANUARY 19 AND DELIVERED AN ULTIMATUM FOR BABUBHAI PATEL TO SAFEGUARD THE INTERESTS OF THE FARMERS AND MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER IN THE STATE OR SUFFER THE LOSS OF KMLP SUPPORT. IT MAY BE REMEMBERED IN THIS REGARD THAT KMLP SUPPORT FOR THE KULAKS WAS SAID TO BE A DECISIVE FACTOR IN THE LACK OF SUPPORT FOR THE KMLP/FRONT IN THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS. WE ALSO HEAR THAT CHIMANBHAI PATEL TRIED TO ENTER THE CONTROLL (R) AFTER THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS, ONLY TO BE REFUSED BY GPCC(R) PRESIDENT HITENDRA DESAI. HITENDRA REPORTEDLY WAS WILLING TO ADMIT ALL OTHER KMLP MEMBERS BUT DREW THE LINE AT CHIMANBHAI. THE ACCEPTANCE OF ALL OTHER KMLP MEMBERS COULD HASTEN THE BREAKUP OF KMLP PARTICULARLY IF THE CPCC(R) KEEPS THE PRESSURE ON THE MEMBERS TO ENTER THE CONGRESS (R).

5. ANOTHER FACTOR TO BE CONSIDERED AS THE POLITICAL MANEUVERING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GETS FULLY UNDER WAY IS HITENDRA DESAI. AFTER GETTING OFF TO A BAD START WITH CONGRESS (R)'S LOSS OF THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, WE HEAR THAT DESAI'S PERFORMANCE IN THE STATE IS NOW SO HIGHLY REGARDED BY PARTY NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS THAT THE PARTY NATIONAL LEADERS HAVE GIVEN HIM A FREE HAND IN THE STATE, MAKING HIM THE FIRST UNDISPUTED LEADER OF THE PARTY IN GUJARAT SINCE THE 1969 SPLIT. AFTER ITS VICTORY IN THE PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS, THE CONGRESS (R) HAS LAUNCHED AN ALL-OUT ATTACK

ON THE PRO-KULAK POLICIES OF THE FRONT GOVERNMENT. VISITING
MINISTERS FROM DELHI ARE ALSO HELPING, WITH THE RESULT THAT THE
CONGRESS (R) HAS REGAINED THE CONFIDENCE IN THE STATE IT
SEEMED TO HAVE LOST IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

6. WHILE PRESSURE FROM DELHI HAS UNDOUBTEDLY WEAKENED THE
FRONT IN RECENT WEEKS WE ARE NOT CONVINCED THAT THE CENTER
WANTS TO PURSUE THIS PROCESS SO VIGOROUSLY AS TO BE CLEARLY
IDENTIFIED AS THE DESTROYER OF THE FRONT GOVERNMENT. RATHER
WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT IT PREFERS THAT THE GUJARAT
GOVERNMENT'S FALL BE OSTENSIBLY AT LEAST OF ITS OWN MAKING.
THE FRONT IS APPARENTLY AWARE OF THIS PROBLEM AND BABUBHAI
PATEL REPORTEDLY ADMITTED IN AHMEDABAD ON JANUARY 26 THAT HE
HOPES THAT IF FRONT FALLS ITS DEMISE WILL BE SEEN TO HAVE BEEN
ENGINEERED IN NEW DELHI. THUS IT WOULD ACHIEVE A SORT OF
MARTYRDOM THAT COULD BE EXPLOITED IN FUTURE. THE BOYCOTT
BY THE FRONT MINISTERS OF THE GOVERNOR'S RECEPTION ON
JANUARY 26 MIGHT WELL MARK THE BEGINNING OF THE "COLD WAR"
BETWEEN THE GOI AND THE FRONT.
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